

## THE LIVINGSTONE HEBREW CONGREGATION AND SYNAGOGUE

The Livingstone Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1910 in the same year that Harry Susman and Annie Grill were married. A plot for a synagogue was allocated but from 1911 until the actual building of the synagogue (*shul*) in 1928, the home of Harry and Annie Susman became the unofficial centre of the community. It was the venue for weekly Sabbath services and meals, the High Holy Days of *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), as well as the scene of religious ceremonies for marriage and circumcision.

The foundation stone of the synagogue was laid by Elie Susman on 20 Tammuz 5688 (8 July 1928). The Hon. H. A. Northcote, Chief Secretary to the government, opened the synagogue on 11 September 1928 when it was consecrated by the Reverend Moses Isaac Cohen and by A. Weinberg, both of Bulawayo.

Along with their care for the Jewish community, the Grill family were instrumental in bringing entertainment to Livingstone. They built the town's first open-air cinema in 1917. This was followed by Grill's Kinema, a corrugated-iron structure, in 1919, and, in 1931, the splendid art-deco Capitol Cinema, which still stands in the main street today.

In 1947, the writer and Zionist emissary Wolf Rybko visited Livingstone. He described what he found among the community and listed their activities in the town in an article that appeared in the 14 October 1947 issue of the *Zionist Record*:

*"The Jewish community of Livingstone consists of 100 souls of whom 20 are children, eight boys and 12 girls. The occupations of the Livingstone Jews are various. There are 12 shopkeepers, 2 bookkeepers, seven shop-assistants, one hotel assistant, one taxi dealer, one civil servant, one brick maker, one plywood manufacturer, one basket manufacturer, one cattle and butchery dealer, one company director, one curio dealer, one furniture dealer, one agent, one poultry farmer, two furriers, one upholsterer, one wholesale merchant, one fitter, one watchmaker, one hotel proprietor, one butcher, two tanners and one trader".*

The Jewish community in Livingstone went into steady decline as a result of immigration from the early 1960s onwards. The synagogue was finally closed by Maurice Rabb, the last president of the congregation, when he left the country in 1971. It has since served as a church.



Children in the Livingstone communal hall adjoining the Livingstone synagogue, circa 1950s



The art-deco Capitol Cinema still stands on Livingstone's main street



Elie Susman lays the foundation stone for the first synagogue in Northern Rhodesia. Livingstone, 1928



Danny Kaye seated at the original Sossy's Bar in Livingstone



Wine goblet presented to Livingstone Hebrew Congregation by Faiga Grill